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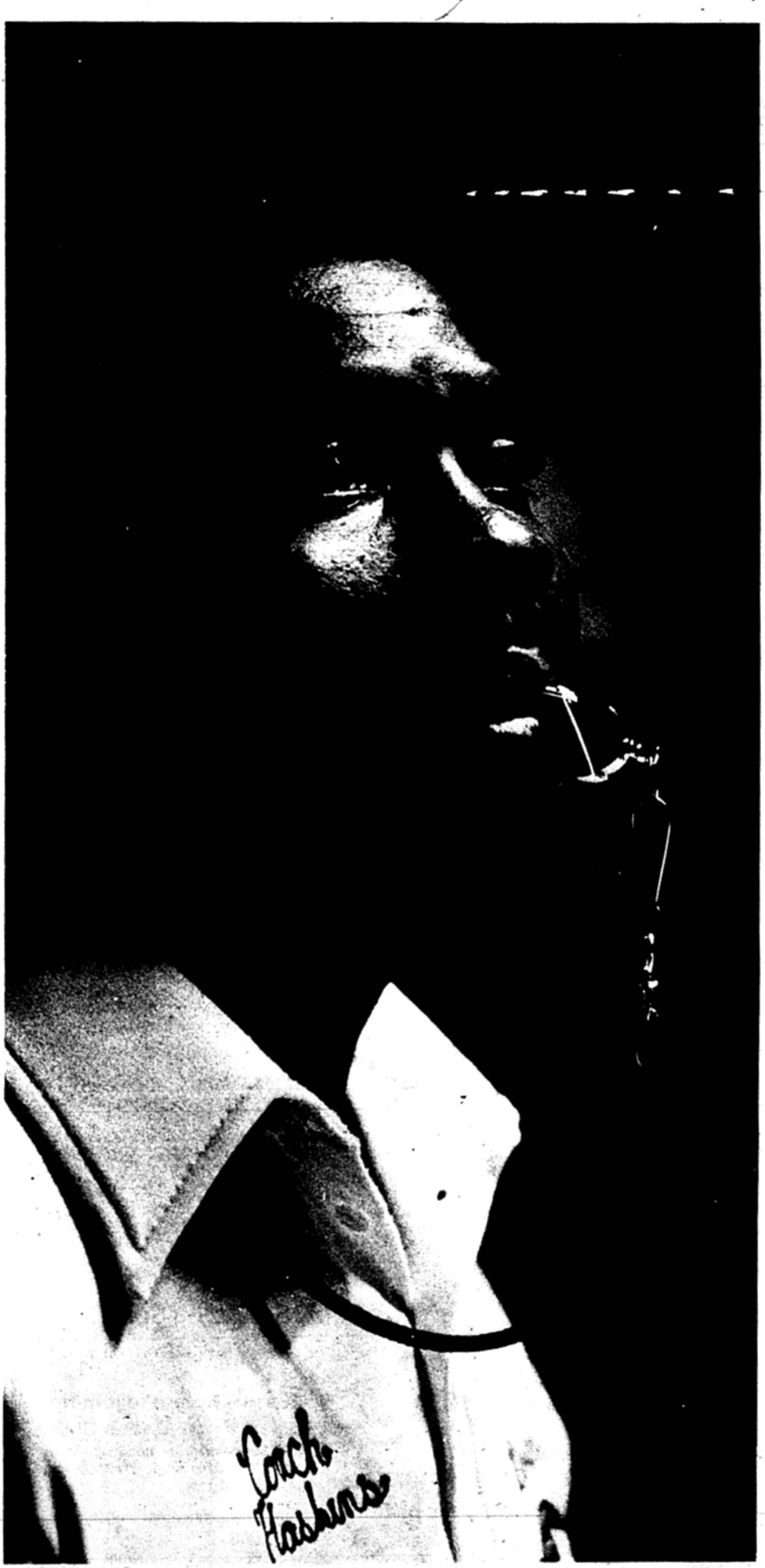
UA12/2/1 December Magazine

WKU Student Affairs



HERALD
Magazine
December

Clem Haskins

English enigmas

Orienteering

That's easy for you to say

'Obverse English' is a sin of the times

Essay by Diane Comer

Some people say it's an enigma, but others might call it an enmity.

It doesn't matter what it's called because there will always be people who call it something else.

It's a questionable stab at logic known as obverse English, and it seems to be on the increase everywhere.

Writer Hugh Mulligan of The Associated Press defines obverse English as "a sturdy, serviceable cliche recycled and slightly reshaped so that the resulting product makes your head turn, as if to ask: How's that again?"

A friend of mine believes that people who use cliches aren't creative enough to think of anything original to say. He also suggested that, in the modern rush of living, people have gotten into such a big hurry that they don't put enough thought into what they say, so they end up scrambling simple cliches.

That makes sense, but still left unexplained is the mystery that has plagued man since the creation of language. Why, after so many years of fumbling to create the perfect tool of communication, don't we communicate perfectly?

I can imagine the first cavemen struggling to explain the meaning of life to each other by grunts, groans and the mad waving of arms. No wonder they started drawing on cave walls.

But the solution to their problem — a spoken language — was not an instant success. Men stumbled over their tongues to learn this new way of communicating, and unfortunately, new communication barriers developed.

In a recent column, Mulligan describes the outpouring of obverse English from conversations overheard in crowded airports. Some of the resulting terminology had to do with The War at home.

"My married daughter is a difficult type," Mulligan heard one woman say in an airport terminal. "She would cut off her face in spite of her nose, which is why she didn't call us at Christmas."

"With children," her friend consoled her, "you've got to take the bit by the horns and swallow your pride."

I became interested in collecting bits of obverse English after reading Mulligan's column. As a writer, I am often surprised by the way people mangle time-worn phrases. It makes listening to the most ordinary conversations entertaining.

For instance, a friend of mine not accustomed to sitting home on Friday nights once declined my party invitation in an unusual way. "Not tonight," she said. "I'm feeling out of the weather."

Some slips of the quips aren't as obvious as others. Another friend fussed at me for not being able to find a phone number I just knew I had right there in my notebook.

"If it was a snake it would have bitten you off by now," he said.

Mulligan says obverse English is "the King's English circa 1785, when it was first observed that King George II was going mad."

That's an interesting premise, and it even explains a few things. I always knew I had some crazy friends.

Obverse English may one day be unwittingly renamed obtuse or obscure English by some of our language's less definitive devotees. People who don't pay attention to what they say don't realize that they may be creating a monster.

During his journey into the realm of obverse English, Mulligan makes a relevant suggestion. "Perhaps," he writes, "we should pick up our marbles and punt."

His suggestion makes a certain amount of sense in light of some of the silly phrases we use. For instance, "That's the way the cookie crumbles," and, "If I told you once, I told you a million times."

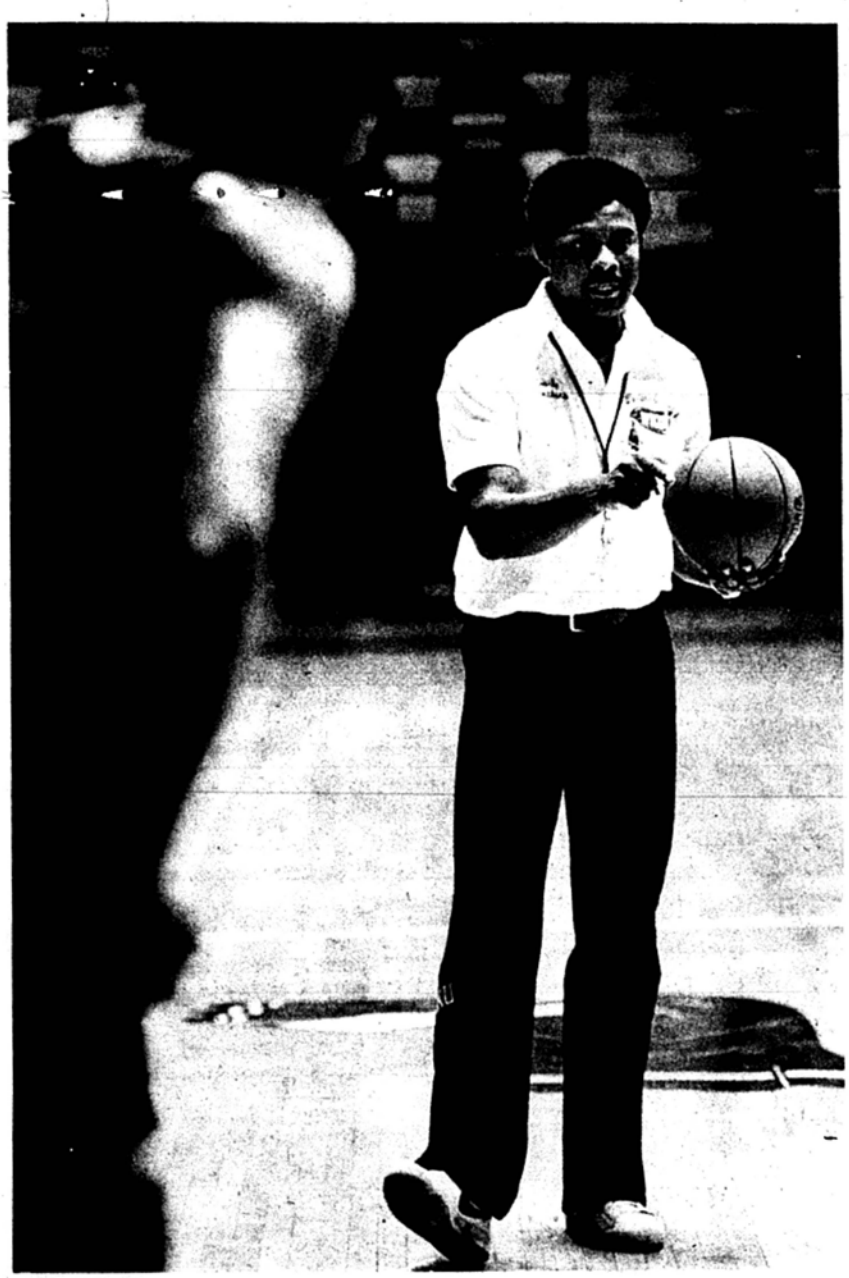
I've always believed humans were too intelligent to toss about inane cliches. But speaking for myself, give me a dose of that twisted obverse logic anytime. One sprinkle is enough to relieve any boring conversation.

Another friend was telling me about the time when he and some buddies were sitting around discussing the meaning of life.

After the group pondered some deep philosophical point one of the guys stood up and put an end to the session.

"Enough is too much!" he shouted.

Try to explain that using sign language.



Coach Clem Haskins makes a point during practice.

Clem 'the gem'

Story by Alan Judd
Photos by Roger Sommer

[Ed] Diddle and Charlie Osborne, one of the school's assistant coaches, let it be known that they are hoping to sign Clem Haskins of Taylor County and Dwight Smith of Princeton Dotson. They are also negroes.

College Heights Herald
April 10, 1963

In the fall of 1963, it took the U.S. Army and hundreds of thousands of dollars to get the first black student enrolled at the University of Alabama.

Also that fall it took considerably less tension and drama to enroll Clem Haskins at Western. He signed up as the first black basketball player in the school's history, and as one of the first blacks ever to attend school here.

It was a strange time, just a few weeks before the president would be shot, a few years before black leaders Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. would also die by the gun.

The times really were changing, especially for black people. A century after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, blacks in America were just beginning to achieve a measure of equality. No small part of that was through sports, and Clem Haskins may have played as big a role as anyone.

For almost 20 years now, Haskins has been quietly but surely breaking down the barriers of race, sports and society, turning the stumbling blocks of prejudice into the stepping stones of success.

He started his personal, winning battle against segregation in 1961 as the first black student at Taylor County High School in his hometown, Campbellsville.

Two years later he was at Western, where he and Dwight Smith became the first black basketball players here, as well as in the Ohio Valley Conference.

Now Haskins is Western's head basketball coach, again the first black in the conference, and one of the few black head coaches in the country.

Sitting in his comfortably furnished office on the ground floor of Diddle Arena, Haskins recently recalled his days as a student and basketball player at Western. The office walls are covered with mementoes of All America honors, with photos of Haskins' family, with a painting of Ed Diddle. Haskins speaks softly; every word is measured, and almost every sentence comprises a complete thought.

Haskins said Western was fun in the '60s, even for a black man, despite occasional hassles because of his race.

It was in the days before it was thought acceptable for black men, who now dominate basketball, to play for many schools. But it was beginning to change, so Haskins, who led his high school to the state tournament, was going to get a shot at the big time.

He enrolled first at the University of Louisville, but decided to leave after a summer in the city. He had plenty of offers. ("A lot of Southeastern Conference teams wanted to integrate—with me," he said.) But he chose Western.

"It was like a minority of one—you stood out like a sore thumb."

But, he added, "The people of Warren County and Bowling Green treated me like any other student and any other person.

"I've always tried to conduct myself with class, and we had a class operation here."

Haskins and Smith were in the minority during games, too.

Haskins said they were spit on, tripped and called "nigger" and other degrading names. But Haskins said he learned to live with it.

"It was really a plug for me. It made me play harder...It was an incentive. In a lot of ways, I credit my success to the people who played me that way and said those nasty things.

"It was something that never bothered me. It inspired me. The pressure didn't bother me once I got on the basketball court."

Judging strictly from the statistics of his years at Western, it's obvious that he played well under any circumstances.

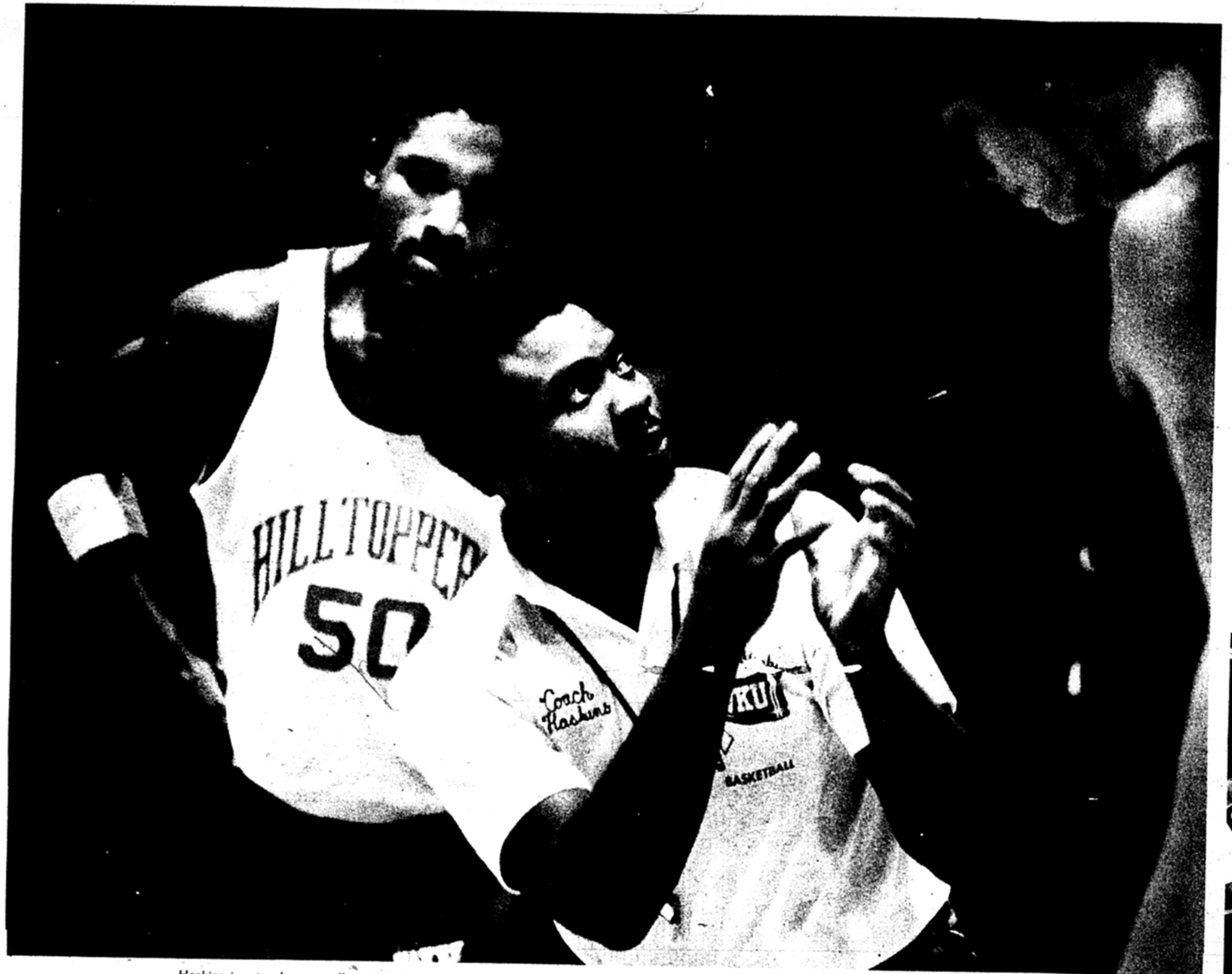
On Western's freshman team, Haskins averaged more than 20 points a game. In all three of his varsity seasons, Western advanced to post-season play. He averaged 22.1 points per game those three years.

He was known as "The Gem" during those years because of his all-around talents: he could run, jump, shoot, do just about anything better than just about anyone.

His senior year, he was named first team All America by the Associated Press. The other four best players in the country were Jim Walker of Providence University, Lew Alcindor (now Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) of UCLA, Westley Unseld of the University of Louisville and Elvin Hayes of the University of Houston. All five players were black.

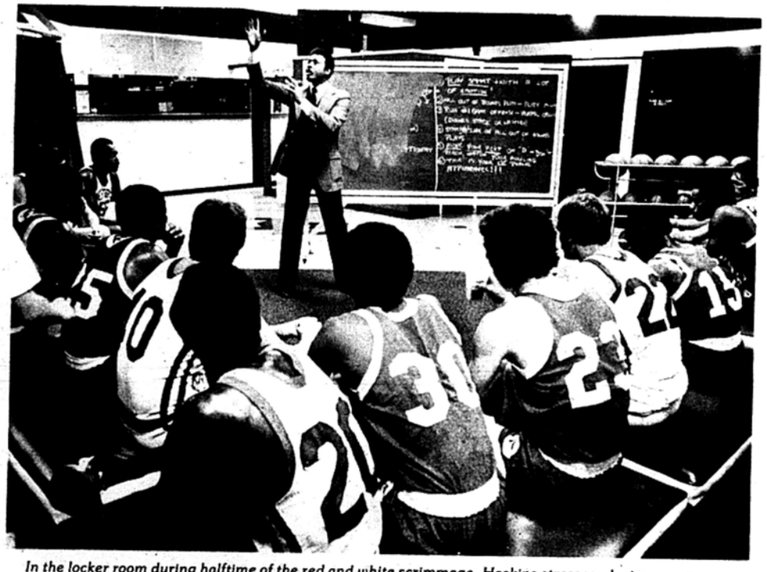
Haskins signed with the Chicago Bulls of the National Basketball Association. He spent nine seasons as a pro, playing for the Bulls, the Phoenix Suns and the Washington Bullets.

After retiring from the pros in 1977, Haskins returned to Bowling Green as a part-time assistant coach for Western and as the manager of the university's continuing education center. He was named a full-time assistant to Gene Keady in 1978 and was apparently the only person seriously considered for the job when Keady moved to



Haskins is a teacher as well as a coach during practices. Here he gives rebounding pointers to Craig McCormick as Percy White watches.

At left, Haskins tosses a jump ball during practice. At a Knights of Columbus meeting, below, Haskins watches the distribution of door prizes, while Ted Hornbeck, one of the men responsible for Haskins' attending Western, watches.



In the locker room during halftime of the red and white scrimmage, Haskins stresses playing as a team, not as individuals.

Clem 'the gem'

continued

Purdue last spring.

Haskins got his job on a miserable, rainy day last April. Speaking at a press conference, Haskins said, his voice cracking, "I want you to know I've experienced many thrills in my life, but accepting the head basketball position here is, without a doubt, the biggest moment in my career."

But on another rainy Sunday almost 13 years earlier was perhaps the lowest point of Haskins' life.

The popular campus leader and cage star would have been graduated in June.

College Heights Herald,
May 18, 1967

Haskins and Smith were natural friends, often separated from other students by their color. They roomed together for 2¼ years (until Haskins got married). Haskins said they became close friends.

"We were just like brothers. We played together, we had fun together, we cried together. With what we had to go through, we had to be close."

Smith was co-captain of the team with Haskins their senior season. He averaged 14.6 points and 10.9 rebounds a game in three varsity seasons. Many people said that if Haskins was the epitome of the team in perfect running condition, Smith was the sparkplug.

On May 14, 1967—"a day I'll never forget," Haskins says—Smith, his brother, Greg, who also played basketball for Western, and their sister, Kay, headed home to Princeton on Mother's Day for a banquet in Dwight's and Greg's honor at the Stillman Methodist Church.

It had been raining for hours when the three left to return to Western. Greg was driving the car along U.S. 41-A when it went out of control in high water and overturned into a creek that was normally almost dry but was several feet deep because of the rain.

Dwight and Kay were trapped in the submerged car and drowned. Dwight was 21, Kay 19.

Haskins was on a trip to Hazard in eastern Kentucky that day, recruiting a high school player that Western was interested in. On the way back he and the man he was traveling with were listening to Louisville radio station WAKY and heard a news report about the accident.

"Believe me, coming out of those hills of eastern Kentucky was really rough," Haskins said. "It seemed like it took a week to get back. My eyes filled with tears. I couldn't drive any more. I was in shock."

Haskins attended the funeral a few days later, and soon he was off to Chicago for the beginning of his professional basketball career. He was the third player picked in the college draft that year and signed a $12,500-a-year contract with the Bulls.

After nine years as a pro, Haskins is back at Western in the midst of a difficult basketball season. Some of his players were not even born when he was opening the door for black students at Taylor County High. Some probably don't even understand the significance of Haskins' hardships while breaking barriers that were overwhelming then, no more than imposing today.

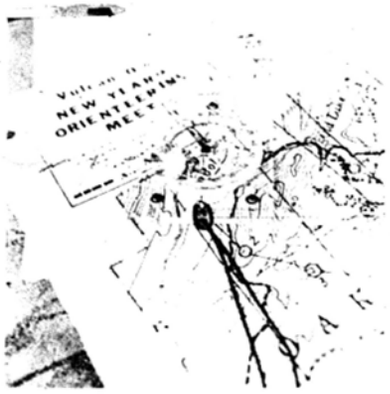
So far, Western has held its own while playing a moderately tough schedule. But the question remains of whether the Hilltoppers will sparkle under the man they used to call "The Gem."

How long will the love affair last? Only as long as Haskins wins... (If Western loses many games) don't expect the fans to be sympathetic.

College Heights Herald
April 14, 1980

CUNNING RUNNING

ORIENTEERS 'TRY TO WIN—AND TRY NOT TO GET LOST'



A map and compass serve as the only guides to direct runners from point to point on the 5.7 kilometer course.

Western's 14 runners trickled in all afternoon.

But when the results of the James J. Garman Orienteering Meet were tallied, the team was surprised to learn they had fared well—placing third in the open-team division and second in the ROTC-team division.

"In three years, I've never seen us pack so much gold home," Rodney Howard, a Calhoun junior, said. "We usually don't get a thing -- half our team usually gets lost."

The morning had started early for the runners. They caught what sleep they could steal from 3 to 6:30 a.m. during the van ride to Standing Stone State Park outside of Cookeville, Tenn.

They wandered into the lodge where teams from as far away as Wisconsin and Virginia were catching last minutes of sleep on the floors and couches. Neil Taylor, a Munfordville senior, said the meet was not a major one, but that teams came from far away because so few are held.

After buying hot chocolate to ward off the cold, Western's team assembled under a shelter outside to look at maps of the area and discuss strategies.

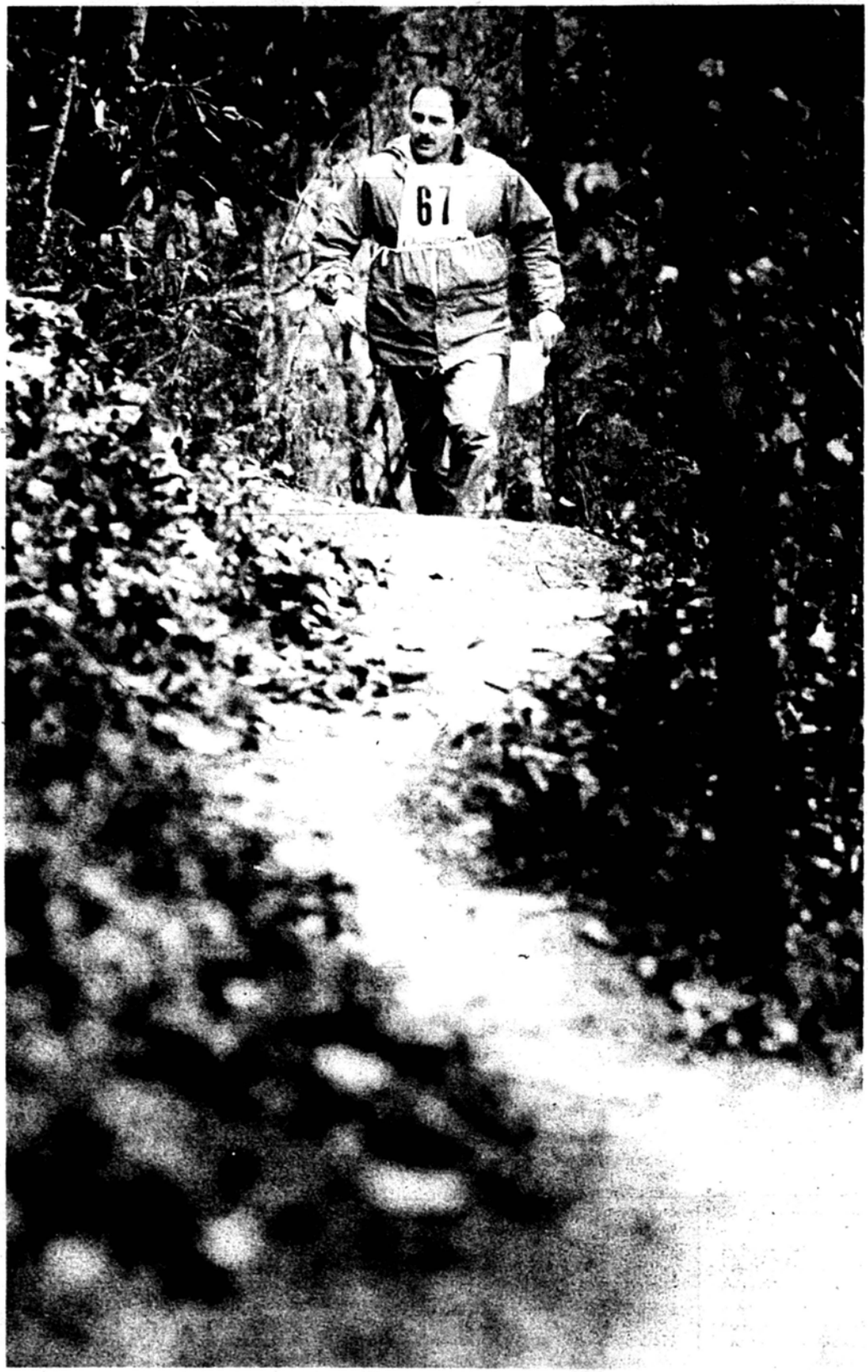
Donna Graves, the only woman of four members who had competed before, showed Rese Turk a map from a previous meet and explained the symbols to her.

"Run a little bit, then sit down and rest. You can follow everybody else for a little while," she told her. "I just pray we don't get lost."

The girls were running the non-competitive novice course, which had six points. The regular, competitive course covered 5.7 kilometers with 10 points. Both courses would take the runners across creeks, valleys and

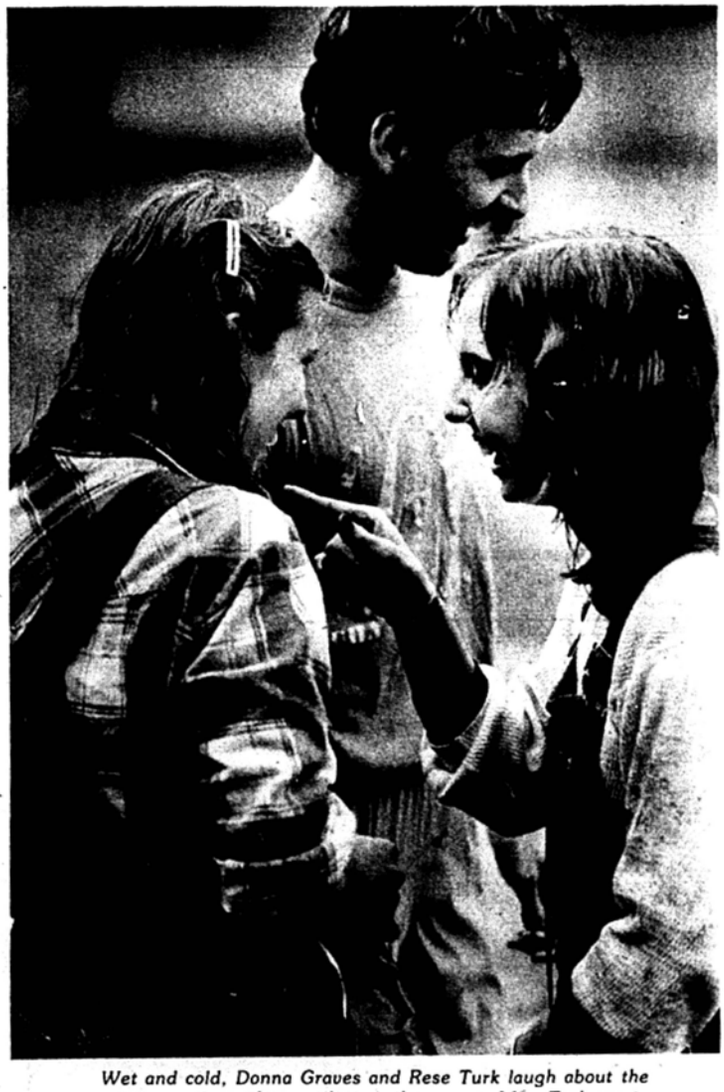
STORY BY CYNDI MITCHELL

PHOTOS BY TODD BUCHANAN



Making his way to the first point, Michael Miller runs through the woods looking for the orange marker at the next point. Miller advises Westerns' team of runners, which participated in the orienteering meet.

Larry Hayden checks his compass while waiting for Julie Chambers to punch her map with a special paper punch. Each punch is different to make sure the runner has made it to each point. Hayden, however, punched in at the wrong point and was disqualified.



Wet and cold, Donna Graves and Rese Turk laugh about the numerous times they got lost on the course. Miss Turk ran in the race for fun, but she said she would never run in another one.

along mountain ridges before taking them to the finish line. Each runner had to punch a card at each point in a specified sequence or he would be disqualified.

Dan Shumate, the team captain, called out the names of the people to be counted in team competition, and gave a few words of advice.

"Run hard -- try to win -- and try not to get lost," he said, laughing.

The first indication that the people gathered there were to compete against each other came at 9 a.m. when the meet director called attention to give final instructions. The 124 runners had been assigned starting times at one-minute intervals, with the last runner leaving at 11:30 a.m.

The first point on the novice course was easily found. Placed on a trail that led from the starting point, several runners punched in with hardly a pause. Another point was not as easily reached. Some slid down the hill above it, other cautiously picked their way up the leaf-filled, slippery creek bed.

Several runners were confused about whether they had found the right point in the right sequence. Points for the novice and competitive courses looked the same, and neither indicated the sequence. One runner paused at the point, ran past it, looked around and returned.

"I can't figure out this point at all; it has to be wrong," she said. But she punched it as her second point anyway. "I'm not going to worry about it," she said.

Dan Shumate paused at the top of the hill south of a point and glanced down at it. But with another check to his map, he flew down the hill and past the point, seemingly sure it was not the right one.

Larry Pickett, a Radcliff freshman, appeared at the top of the same hill several minutes later. He knelt in the leaves, shot a compass point and slid down the hill, ignoring the marker also. He headed back up the north slope, choosing a path similar to Shumate's.

After 98 minutes after he had picked up his compass and put on his bib, Taylor made his way down the rocky valley leading from the last point. A steep, muddy bank was the only obstacle left.

Putting his map between his teeth, Taylor half slid, half ran down the bank and flew to the finish line. After he turned in his bib, Taylor, who expects to be nationally ranked by the end of the year, was told he had the fastest time at the point. He later found out he had placed third in the individual open competition and received another trophy for being the cadet with the shortest time.

"I lost a good 20 minutes at a couple of points," he said. "The map said one thing, and the ground said something else." Taylor said that he, Dan and Mike Shumate had spent several minutes at one point trying to decide if it was the right one. They finally decided it was too far up the valley and headed back down. But they soon realized it was the point they were looking for and had to return.

"That's part of why they call it "cunning running," Taylor said. "If you can find the right point and your competitor gets lost, that's his bad luck." He shrugged and went back to the van for clean clothes and something to drink.

Meanwhile, Dan Shumate came in, and was told he had qualified.

"Some meets are fast-time meets and other are high-disqualifying meets," he said. "This is definitely going to be a high-disqualifying meet.

Several teams were aggravated at the quality of the course. Taylor, who has competed in 20 meets, said many parts of the map and clue sheet did not coincide with the terrain. The markers had no way for runners to determine the correct sequence, which caused a lot of confusion. More than 30 runners were disqualified in the meet sponsored by Tennessee Tech on Nov. 15.

"You mean we traveled 12 hours for this," a runner from Wisconsin said.

Graves and Miss Turk, who had ran together, soon appeared at the top of the bank. They sat down and slid to the bottom, laughing so hard they could hardly stand up. Pulling and tugging on each other, they stumbled and fell toward the finish line. Graves dragged Miss Turk the last few feet.

"If you ever, ever, ever ask me to run in one of these things again -- I'll kill you," Graves threatened Dan Shumate.

Graves said she didn't think they'd found all the points, much less in sequence.

"We got lot at the second point, so we decided to just skip two and three," she said. "When we finally found the fifth point -- you talk about excited."

Miss Turk said, "They sure weren't kidding when they told us there were no escalators, no taxis, no nothing up there."

When Rodney Howard, a Calhoun junior, finished the course without disqualifying, the chances looked good that the team of he, the Shumates and Taylor would place.

Doug Price, an Owensboro senior, was the last Western runner to straggle in, at 2:30 p.m. Howard said he was surprised because he was usually the one who got lost.

Price explained, "I got so wrapped up in the scenery I just didn't want to come in."

The team, some showered and dressed, some still wet and muddy gathered in the van, ready to go home.

The group piled back into the van, much livelier than when they left Bowling Green 12 hours earlier. They joked and fought over where to eat and who would sit in the front.

But as the van continued down the road and the light faded, so did the noise in the van. Before long, they were trying to catch the sleep they had lost, heads nodding with every curve in the road.

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